

WASHINGTON TIMES  
18 November 1986

# NSC, State lock horns over staff in Moscow

By Tom Diaz  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The State Department and the National Security Council are locked in a fight over staffing of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow following the recent round of tit-for-tat expulsions of U.S. and Soviet diplomats.

The NSC and the U.S. intelligence community, according to sources, believe that an embassy staffing plan proposed by U.S. Ambassador to Moscow Arthur A. Hartman will hurt U.S. intelligence-gathering in Moscow.

But the State Department backs Mr. Hartman and says the intelligence community is complaining about consequences it should have known were inevitable when it pushed a hard line on expelling the Soviets.

The dispute has generated tough talk on both sides.

"Hartman is doing what the KGB has been unable to do," a senior administration official said of the proposed embassy staffing. "He will have more maids in the embassy than CIA case officers. This is going to seriously hurt what few [intelligence] assets we have in Moscow."

"That's nonsense," a State Department official replied. "No one's function is going to be hurt. You can say they [some of those complaining] have been top-heavy and overrepresented [on the embassy's staff]."

Opponents of the staffing plan also claim that, if it is implemented, it will set off a chain of events that will set back counterintelligence gains the United States won when it expelled Soviet operatives working as diplomats here. They fear the State Department — which strongly opposed expelling the Soviet diplomats — is using the staffing issue to reopen the expulsion question, a charge the State Department denies.

The exchange of expulsion orders between Moscow and Washington began in September, when the administration ordered 25 Soviet diplomats stationed in New York to leave the country. In October, Moscow expelled five American diplomats. The United States then countered by ordering 55 more Soviets out, to which the Soviets replied by expelling five more Americans and withdrawing 260 Soviet citizens from support jobs at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the U.S. Consulate in Leningrad.

Withdrawal of the Soviet support

workers — long said by U.S. counterintelligence officers to be KGB plants — has forced the United States to restructure its staffing of the embassy. It is over the final shape of the restructured staff that the battle is being fought in Washington.

Sources said there has been no final decision on embassy staffing, but the matter has been the subject of heated exchanges between the NSC and the State Department.

The intelligence community — including CIA Director William Casey, according to one source — and the NSC have argued against the embassy staffing plan proposed by Mr. Hartman on the grounds that it allows too many support personnel at the expense of intelligence and other substantive functions.

"The Soviets never had the nerve to go as far [in expelling enough Americans to seriously cut into U.S. intelligence assets in Moscow] as he [Hartman] is doing with a stroke of the pen," one source said.

But Secretary of State George Shultz has supported Mr. Hartman on the grounds that he is the president's personal representative and, as the person on the spot, should be allowed to make his own local decisions.

"What we have here is a very intelligent chief of mission [Mr. Hartman] doing his best to respect the entire spectrum and come up with something that works under the circumstances," a State Department source said. "It's interesting that the counterintelligence people and their friends in the NSC felt very strongly that we should make major expulsions from this country ... [but] as soon as we have to restructure the embassy as a result of Soviet retaliation, suddenly nobody can spare any [personnel] slots."

Intelligence officials are pessimistic about their ability to turn the decision around. It is believed that Mr. Shultz now has the most powerful hand among foreign affairs policy players at the White House as a result of the recent NSC fiasco involving arms shipments to Iran in exchange for renewed diplomatic contacts and, possibly, hostages.

"[National Security Adviser John] Poindexter is in no position to

go to Shultz now and take a forceful position on this issue," one source said. "Shultz will just laugh and say,

'Hey, look, your guts are hanging out.'"

According to sources, some members of the NSC and the intelligence community think that Mr. Hartman and the State Department — who disagreed with the decision to oust the Soviet diplomats in the first place — are playing a "close-the-Washington-Monument game" to force Washington to renegotiate staff levels with Moscow.

"It's the 'fire-the-cops-and-firemen-first' game that mayors play when the city council cuts their budgets," one source said. "They will come back at some point in the future and say, 'See, we told you that this wouldn't work.'"

"I absolutely reject any suggestion that this is a vendetta or that we are playing any game of firing cops and firemen first," a State Department official said.

Nevertheless, the possibility causes the intelligence community its second worry — that the end result months down the road will be renegotiation, which would raise staffing levels for both countries and allow the Soviets to replace their expelled KGB officers.

"This [the round of expulsions] was one of the few matches with the Soviets that we won," a source said. At the time of the expulsions, U.S. officials said Soviet spy operations in the United States had been "decapitated."

"But our win is in serious danger of being reversed by the way Hartman and the State Department are handling this issue," the source said. "I don't know which is worse — the harm done to our assets in Moscow or the harm that will be done when the KGB gets its people back in here."

But a State Department official disagreed, saying the Soviets won the round by withdrawing the 260 local employees from U.S. diplomatic posts.

"They forced a fundamental restructuring on us," he said. "They don't have to contend with that because they never hired many U.S. locals here."

One source said Mr. Hartman has taken personal control of the new staffing plan in Moscow and refused input from the intelligence community about how the staff cutbacks should be handled.

Mr. Shultz was said to have been "apoplectic" when President Reagan made the final decision to oust the Soviet diplomats. Mr. Hartman sent back to Washington a number of "blistering" cables with "extremely intemperate language" opposing the move before the final decision was made, a source said.